

Testimony before the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement

**HB 6403: An Act Requiring Legislative Approval for the Merger or Closing
of Institutions Within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities**

Submitted by Sally L. Coan, Adjunct Instructor of Biology, Tunxis Community College

March 8, 2021

Dear Senators and Representatives:

My name is Sally Coan and I have had the privilege of teaching as an adjunct instructor of biology at Tunxis Community College for the past 16 years.

I strongly support House Bill 6403 and urge you to pass it with the following changes:

1. The proposed bill states that if the legislature does not act within one year, a proposed merger or closure “shall be deemed approved.” I recommend changing that to “shall be deemed not approved.” (Lines 32 and 33)
2. I recommend adding the clause “that the BOR shall not seek regional accreditation for a merger that has not been approved by the General Assembly.”

Over the last several years, I have witnessed the gradual changes at my local college, as the community college system is currently being viewed as a business by those who have never taught in a classroom. The growing bureaucracy in Hartford is evident. Even position titles, (chief executive officers in place of college presidents), reflect the mindset of a corporation, not an institution of higher education. I am opposed to the consolidation of the state’s twelve community colleges into one centralized Community College of Connecticut. And, I am appalled that the state’s Board of Regents (BOR) has sole authority to implement this measure that directly impacts all working professionals at our college, the taxpayer and, most importantly, the thousands of students that attend our community colleges across the state.

Prior to my state employment as a college educator, I worked for a small private filtration company in Meriden, Connecticut that was acquired by three different parent companies during the 19 years that I was employed. First, our company was a division of AMF, then a subsidiary of another larger entity. For a short period of time, we were a stand-alone company known as Cuno Incorporated until we were finally bought by 3M Corporation where the company name Cuno, named for its founder, eventually disappeared. The entire culture of this small business was lost. Consolidation and reorganization of departments led to layoffs, impacting myself and many others. To use an analogy, the big fish swallowed the little fish and cast off what was special and unique, disregarded the experience of those who had contributed

to making the little fish attractive in the first place, and made changes that, in appearance, looked to be beneficial to all, but in reality, was only about profiting the larger entity.

Having experienced these negative impacts of buyouts and mergers and seeing first-hand the unintended consequences of these mergers, I fear for our community colleges and the students they serve. The uniqueness of each of the colleges will be lost, many of the services will be consolidated and controlled by the System Office, and mandates will eventually follow that threaten our programs and the academic freedom to teach as we wish. Students who require guidance and support are more apt to reach out to someone they know and trust, usually a faculty member who has taught one of their courses. These students chose a community college for that reason: small class size and personal attention to the students' unique learning style. That personal interaction will be lost once the "one size fits all" model becomes commonplace. The "Students First" consolidation will not be in the best interest of the student. Therefore, no one person or bureaucratic group should have the sole power to make decisions on behalf of higher education in Connecticut without oversight by our elected officials in the legislature.

Accordingly, I urge your support for **HB 6403**, along with the suggested changes noted above. The future of our community colleges is at stake. Thank you for your time and consideration.